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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KAMPALA 000669

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SUBJECT: UGANDA: OFFICIAL DISCUSSIONS WITH ERITREA ON SOMALIA

Classified By: P/E Chief Kathleen FitzGibbon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: President Museveni and Foreign Minister Kutesa held two separate, but similar, meetings with Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki over the issue of external support for Somali factions. Museveni and Kutesa asked that Eritrea end its support for the Islamic Courts in early April and late March. In both meetings, Isaias accused Uganda of being dragged into Somalia by the U.S. and Ethiopia and warned Uganda to pull out its troops. Museveni denied being a "stooge" of the U.S. Museveni apparently had hoped that direct engagement could persuade Eritrea to cooperate, but walked away empty-handed. Museveni reportedly remains concerned about Eritrea's "isolation" and ties to Sudan. Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials say Uganda will continue to reach out to Eritrea on regional issues, including Somalia. End Summary.

¶2. (C) President Yoweri Museveni and Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa met with Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki in two separate meetings held within a period of two weeks. Julius Kagamba Singoma, the Director for East Africa and Somalia at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was present in Kutesa's meeting on March 22 and traveled with Museveni for his meeting on April 2. He relayed this account of the meetings to P/E Chief.

¶3. (C) On March 22, Museveni sent Kutesa as a special envoy to present Isaias with evidence of Eritrean complicity with Islamic elements and ask that Eritrea end this support. Kutesa presented photographs of Eritreans who were killed in Mogadishu and intelligence information from captured Eritreans, according to Kagamba. Kutesa told Isaias that the Ugandan Government wanted Isaias to have ground truth. According to Kagamba, Isaias did not deny Kutesa's allegations and asked Kutesa why Uganda went to Somalia. He accused Uganda of being "dragged in" by the United States and Ethiopia. He advised Kutesa that it is not too late to get out. He also warned Kutesa that Uganda would regret getting involved. Isaias then launched into a long history of the region. He said that Uganda could not understand the dynamics of the situation because it was not Ugandan history, but Eritrea's and Ethiopia's history in the Horn of Africa.

¶4. (C) Kutesa responded that Uganda was once a failed state that needed its neighbors' help. Tanzanian intervention helped get Uganda back on the right track. Kutesa said that President Museveni wanted Isaias' help with restoring stability and order in Somalia. Isaias told Kutesa that Somalia was a highly complicated situation that could not easily be resolved. He stated that the Transitional Federal Government was not legitimate. The Islamic Courts were a legitimate authority and had been accepted by the Somali people. Uganda needed to withdraw quickly. He warned Kutesa that the best scenario for Uganda if it remained in Somalia

would be worse than Iraq is for the United States. Isaias said that the U.S. could afford to absorb the costs in lives and funding of Iraq, but that Uganda could bear the price that it would pay in Somalia. Isaias also told Kutesa that both the African Union and Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) were "dead" because neither institution checked Ethiopian aggression.

¶ 15. (C) Museveni met with Isaias on April 2 to urge Eritrea to end support for Somali Islamists. According to Kagamba, Museveni's meeting with Isaias unfolded along the same lines.

Isaias repeated his warning that Uganda should leave Somalia as soon as possible. Publicly, Isaias described Uganda's intervention as "hasty." Isaias also said that Uganda was part of a peacekeeping force that was "taking sides." Uganda's Regional Affairs Minister Isaac Musumba, who also traveled to Asmara, stated that Museveni went to Eritrea to find middle ground. Uganda is supporting the IGAD-created TFG. Eritrea wants "the Islamic Courts Union as a legitimate government in Somalia." He added that Eritrea would not recognize the TFG.

¶ 16. (C) According to Kagamba, the atmospherics of the Kutesa meeting were good, despite the deep differences in positions.

He said that Isaias received Kutesa immediately after arrival and that the Eritrean Government officials appeared to appreciate the visit. Museveni came away from his meeting convinced that Eritrea was closely coordinating its activities in Somalia and Darfur with Sudan. Kagamba said that the President had thought he could reason with Isaias because he had considered Eritrea not to be in the sphere of the "Arab fundamentalists." However, Museveni's meeting with Isaias changed his mind about Eritrea's intentions and allies.

¶ 17. (C) Nonetheless, Ugandan Foreign Ministry officials were

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pleased that Eritrea attended a recent IGAD meeting, according to Kagamba. However, Eritrea balked at the provisions in the communique which commended Ethiopia for rescuing the Transitional Federal Government, expressed concern about extremists, and invited the international community to provide assistance to Somalia.

¶ 18. (U) In a related development, Museveni publicly denied being a "stooge" of the U.S., and he defended Uganda's participation in Somalia in an April 19 newspaper statement. Museveni refuted assertions made in an earlier newspaper article that the recent events in Somalia were orchestrated by the United States; that the U.S. decided "their guy" is Abdallahi Yusuf; Ethiopia was the only "ally" of the U.S. in the Horn of Africa; the IGAD initiative in Kenya that resulted in the Somalia agreement was inspired by the U.S.; and the violence in Somalia is now "worse than ever." Museveni pointed out that the U.S. took actions that delayed the implementation of IGAD's plans for Somalia, but that U.S. support now for African efforts on Somalia was welcome. Museveni stated that it is insulting to be called a "stooge" of the U.S. because black African countries were capable of defending regional interests without being told to do so by Western powers. Museveni stated that the Islamic Courts made mistakes and should now negotiate with other Somalis to broaden unity, enrich the interim arrangement for an agreed period, and hold elections to give back to the Somalis their sovereignty.

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COMMENT
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¶ 19. (C) According to our MFA contacts, Museveni and Kutesa walked away empty-handed from their visits to Eritrea. Nonetheless, MFA officials say that Uganda is in Somalia for the long haul and would continue to look for ways to diminish external support for the various Somali factions.

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